



Eliminate Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin

A response to Senate Joint Resolution 65

In 2009, the Wisconsin State Legislature approved Senate Resolution 65 calling for a report on the magnitude of childhood lead poisoning, its impact on the Wisconsin educational and criminal justice systems, and solutions to the problem. The following are highlights from the full report submitted to the Wisconsin State Legislature in January 2011.

Report Highlights

Childhood lead poisoning is a costly problem for Wisconsin. However, this problem has a readily identifiable solution: remove or fix lead paint hazards in older homes.

Establish a sustainable funding source to control lead paint hazards

The Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Elimination Implementation and Oversight Committee (IOC) recommends that Wisconsin create a statewide revolving loan program to assist property owners by offering them no- or low-interest loans to fix lead paint hazards in older homes. Wisconsin should couple the fund with a widespread community awareness campaign to promote the loan program and increase public awareness of the risks of lead poisoning and ways to reduce these risks.

Where children get lead poisoned

- ▶ Most children are lead poisoned in their homes due to lead-contaminated dust from deteriorating paint.
- ▶ Approximately 90% of lead-poisoned children in Wisconsin reside in dwellings built before 1950. Dwellings built before 1950 are the highest risk for lead paint hazards because lead-free latex paints were not yet available.
- ▶ There are more than 400,000 existing dwellings built before 1950 that have lead paint hazards across all 72 counties in Wisconsin.

Lead poisoning is a concern to our society and Wisconsin taxpayers

Wisconsin children have among the highest lead poisoning rates in the nation. More than 46,000 children under age six, ***enough to fill Miller Park***, were reported lead poisoned since 1996; more than 1,500 children in 2009 alone. Every county in the state is affected. There is no safe level of lead in the human body. Lead exposure decreases the life-long potential of affected children by damaging the human brain -- reducing a child's ability to learn and causing behavioral problems -- and life-long health problems.

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What lead poisoning is costing Wisconsin

- ▶ A linkage has been firmly established between lead-poisoned children and failure in school as well as later criminal and violent behavior. Children who were lead poisoned are three times more likely to fail standardized tests and are more likely to be arrested for a violent crime as a young adult.
- ▶ Lead poisoning costs a fortune. Each year Wisconsin spends over \$5 billion on school aids including \$375 million for special education and \$1 billion for corrections. Some percentage of these costs is attributable to lead poisoning
- ▶ If each Wisconsin child age 0-6 today were protected from any lead exposure, the improvement in the state high school graduation rate and the reduction in crime across the state would save Wisconsin **\$28 billion**. These savings¹ would multiply each year as new children are born in Wisconsin.

{Nearly one in every 20 children entering the Wisconsin school system in the fall of 2006 was known to be lead poisoned.}

Legacy of Lead: The Report on Childhood Lead Poisoning in Wisconsin 2008.

Legislative report recommendations

Create a sustainable loan program accessible to all owners of pre-1950 properties to fix lead paint hazards and thus create lead-safe housing for children. An annual investment of at least \$20 million a year would allow for lead paint hazards to be addressed in at least 2,000 additional homes each year.

In concert with establishing a loan fund:

- Dedicate resources for ongoing evaluation of lead poisoning elimination efforts.
- Implement a strategic community awareness campaign for lead-safe housing.

Funding recommendations include:

- Authorize a paint surcharge.
- Establish bonding authority.
- Create a voluntary contribution on the Wisconsin income tax form and match it with general purpose revenue.

For more details on these recommendations and the full report, visit www.chawisconsin.org or contact Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin at (414) 292-4000.

For more information on childhood lead poisoning, visit *Lead-Safe Wisconsin*, www.dhs.wi.gov/lead, or call the Wisconsin Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program at (608) 266-5817.

¹ Based on a cost/benefit analysis in *The social costs of childhood lead exposure in New Jersey*, P. Muennig, P. Bao, prepared in December 2009 for the New Jersey Department of the Public Advocate.